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SENSITIVE
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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/CE JAMIE LAMORE AND ERIC GAUDIOSI,
EUR/PGI JODY BUCKNEBERG, AND DRL

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [PINS](#) [SOCI](#) [HU](#)
SUBJECT: ANTI-ROMA PUBLIC OPINION IN HUNGARY: OUT OF
CONTROL OR STATUS QUO?

REF: A. BUDAPEST 00362
[1](#)B. BUDAPEST 00361
[1](#)C. BUDAPEST 00360
[1](#)D. BUDAPEST 00168

Classified By: Acting Pol/Econ Counselor:Steve Weston,
reasons 1.4(b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: News of a "dramatic increase" in anti-Roma sentiment in Hungary has been reported by both the international and domestic press in recent weeks. However, despite the conclusion that Hungarians are growing more anti-Roma, Post's review of historical polling data calls this into question. In fact, based on polling data, it is more accurate to conclude that, while the public sentiment is highly anti-Roma, it has been relatively stable for almost a decade. Although the rise of the extremist group Magyar Garda and the increasing popularity of the far-right political party Jobbik do point to a radicalization of one segment of society, statistical data does not seem to support the suggestion that the broader society is more anti-Roma than before. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) As the popularity of the extremist group Magyar Garda and the far-right party Jobbik has grown over the past several months (ref A), several international and domestic news outlets have suggested that anti-Roma sentiment is on the rise in Hungary. In a story published online by The Nation magazine on May 18, anti-Roma sentiment was reported to have "increased dramatically." Similarly, in a article on the Financial Times website on May 11, a "mainstream politician" was quoted as saying, "You now hear anti-gypsy sentiment at every level of society." The New York Times struck a similar chord in an April 27 article that reported that, "prejudice against Roma has swelled."

[1](#)3. (C) Based on these claims, Post undertook a review of historical polling data and found little statistical evidence to support the assertions that Hungarians are now "dramatically" more anti-Roma. Based on the results of a series of surveys conducted by the pollster Median over a period of eight years, there have only been negligible fluctuations in the public's attitude towards Roma. While answers to some of the survey's questions suggest a slight up-tick in anti-Roma sentiment since 2001, even these results fall close to or within the margin of error.

[1](#)4. (U) Examples of responses from Median polls taken in 2001 and 2009 include the following:

Agree or disagree?: "Gypsies do nothing to integrate into society."
2001: 75 percent agree
2009: 79 percent agree

Agree or disagree?: "Gypsies should be forced to live like others."

2001: 76 percent agree

2009: 79 percent agree

Agree or disagree?: "Gypsies do not deserve to be supported."

2001: 58 percent agree

2009: 61 percent agree

Agree or disagree?: "Gypsies should be segregated."

2001: 29 percent agree

2009: 36 percent agree

Agree or disagree?: "The government of Hungary should do more for the gypsies."

2001: 23 percent agree

2009: 23 percent agree

15. (C) While the Median results call into question claims of a "dramatic increase" in anti-Roma sentiment, there is still broad consensus among several recent public opinion polls that the anti-Roma sentiment in Hungary remains strong. Along with Median's findings, recent polling results from three other organizations (Progressive Institute, Publicus Institute, and Marketing Centrum) reveal that the Hungarian public has a well-entrenched negative opinion of Roma on a wide range of issues, especially those related to crime and integration.

16. (U) The following is a sampling of results from these polls organized by subject area:

CRIME:

88 percent said they felt frightened by Roma.

62 percent said Roma population increases pose a security threat.

46 percent said some crimes are mostly committed by Roma

INTEGRATION:

52 percent said Roma people are not capable of living with non-Romas.

50 percent said it is better when Roma and non-Roma do not co-exist.

GENERAL OPINIONS:

78 percent said they had anti-Roma feelings, with an additional 2 percent said these feelings were "strong."

17. (C) Comment: Any conclusion that the far right's increasing popularity represents a significant shift of opinion among the mainstream population towards Roma appears to be unfounded. Although these groups have been successful at mobilizing their base and ratcheting up the rhetoric over the past several months, so far it is difficult to confirm meaningful shifts in the mainstream public's opinions. If the Median poll is accurate, the public's opinion of Roma has gone unchanged for nearly a decade. However, the question of the far right's prospects for growth may not depend on whether they can successfully change the minds of those who are more sympathetic to Roma. Instead, their success more likely depends on their ability to appeal to those who already harbor anti-Roma feelings and are open to embracing a more radical position. And, as the polling results show, the

pool of prospective recruits, although not growing, still represents a sizable portion of the Hungarian population.
End comment.

Levine